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LIFE Book REVIEW

It's Just as Cold for a Real Spy

The best-selling novel in the U.S. right now is *The Spy Who Came In from the Cold.* It should be. A wire-taut story of an aging secret agent sent on a mission he fears and imperfectly understands, it makes the bumptious fisticuffs of James Bond sound like Action Comics. It also makes chillingly clear what it *is* like to be a spy: bitter, ambiguous, dangerous and lonely.

Now, marvelously, there comes along another fine new book about espionage. It is just about as compelling as *The Spy*—but it happens to be true. *Strangers on a Bridge* by James Donovan (Atheneum) tells—with a clarity and sense of concern that a lot of fiction writers should study—the case of Colonel Rudolph Ivanovich Abel, who spent nine years in the cold as the chief Soviet spy in the U.S. Abel was a colonel in the KGB, the Soviet spy agency, who came here illegally in 1948. He moved to a drab hotel in Manhattan and worked out of a drab studio in Brooklyn, and ran a drab spy ring all over the country until 1957. Then one of his agents, a hard-drinking and inept lieutenant named Hayhanen, went over to our people when it appeared that his next duty station would be Siberia. When the FBI arrested Abel, James Donovan, a respected New York attorney and a former Navy Intelligence officer himself, agreed to represent him.

Donovan took on the defense of a dedicated and dangerous spy out of his deep belief in the guarantees of the Constitution—and he did it, as his book recurringly shows, against a lot of social and business pressure. Clients took accounts away from his firm. Women made snide cracks at his wife. He went right ahead anyway, but despite the superbly skillful defense he gave Abel, the court sentenced the spy to 30 years.

The strength of this book lies in its strong and parallel portraits of its two chief characters, Donovan and Abel. They turn out to be a lot alike: loners; men willing to stand and fight in favor of their own, enormously divergent principles. They also turn out to be—in their different ways—very brave men.

("When your appeal succeeds," Abel asked Donovan once, "what happens to me then?" "I may have to shoot you myself," said Donovan. "Don't forget, I still am a commander in Naval Intelligence.")

Abel's character comes into focus gradually because he revealed himself grudgingly. He would take a little of Donovan's aid and understanding, then pull away like a mistrustful dog. But when we do finally get to know him, his resemblance to Leamas—the fictional agent in *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold*—is extraordinary.

Like Leamas, Abel was a fierce patriot. Talking of Reino Hayhanen, the agent who betrayed him to the U.S., he said, "I cannot understand why a man, to save his own skin, would betray his country and place his family in complete dishonor at home." Like Leamas he was versatile: he could paint pictures, work complex mathematics problems and run a lathe, and he passionately loved the Dodgers. Like Leamas he was uninformed about many essentials of his own work: he had known all along that Hayhanen was a fool and a security risk, but he could only assume that this was necessary to some Byzantine KGB operation he hadn't been told about. Like Leamas he was totally lonely. He lived in his tiny room and worked in his tiny studio and found his human relationships catch-as-catch can: a few students, a fellow painter or two, a girl singer he had once photographed.

Then Donovan came into his life, a splendid representative of a system Abel was devoting his life to undermine. And like Leamas, Abel seems to have shown glimmers, then, that there are other fights to fight and causes to support than the bleak ones of war, hot or cold.

Donovan carried his fight all the way to the Supreme Court, which came within one vote of reversing the conviction and freeing Abel. That he was not executed may be due in part to Donovan's plea that the colonel might someday be traded to the Soviets in return for a captured U.S. agent. Three years after Abel was arrested, a Russian missile winged Francis Gary Powers' U-2. Almost two years of diffident negotiations followed, after which Donovan flew secretly to Berlin, crossed the Wall and set up just the kind of swap he had envisioned.

Somewhere in Russia today there lives a short, spare man with a hard, thin mouth and the apprehensive eyes of a bird. If the KGB security people have cleared him, he is likely working on—or running—the U.S. desk of Soviet Intelligence. His name is not Martin Collins nor Emil Goldfus nor "Mark" nor Rudolph Ivanovich Abel nor any of the other aliases he used here; even Donovan never learned what his name really was. He is a man who was and is dangerous to this country, yet he profited immeasurably by this country's unique concern for justice; in those terms we owe him no sympathy. But he was also a man who did his job cleanly for a cause he believed in. As a spy, we cannot wish Abel well. As a man, when he leaves Donovan in the mists of morning to walk over a Berlin bridge, we can hope that he came out of the cold.

by Paul Mandel